

Chapter 3

Who Are the Part-Time Workers?

INTRODUCTION

The term “part-time” is based on working less than 35 hours per week, a standard developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In 1990, 22.7 million people worked part time in the United States (Figure 3.1). This figure represents an increase of 2.8 million over the number of workers in 1980.

On average, part-time workers in the United States worked 21 hours a week in 1990 (Figure 3.2). As indicated in the previous chapter, part-time work can be either voluntary or involuntary. However, the 5 Percent Public Use Micro-Sample (PUMS) census data file does not allow us to determine the extent to which part-time workers in 1990 were voluntary or involuntary; consequently, that factor is not included in our analysis.

This chapter focuses on the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of those who worked part time in 1990, as well as on the occupations in which they worked. The chapter begins with a broad overview of the general demographics of part-time workers, followed by an in-depth analysis of the specific demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of women, teenagers, seniors and the elderly—four population groups identified as those most likely to work part time.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PART-TIME WORKERS

Compared to the full-time workforce, women, teenagers, seniors, and the elderly were over-represented in the part-time workforce. Women made up two-thirds of the part-time force, a

proportion that was more than 20 percentage points higher than that of females in the full-time workforce. Teenagers comprised 17 percent of the part-time workforce, a proportion that was more than eight times higher than that of teens working full time. Seniors (60 to 64 years old) and the elderly (65+) were also disproportionately represented when compared to the full-time workforce. Additionally, male part-time workers made up the largest percentage of the teenage, senior, and elderly part-time workforce.

Gender

Women dominated the part-time workforce and were almost twice as likely as men to be in this category. Among the 22.7 million people who worked part time in 1990, 14.6 million were women (64 percent), and 8.1 million were men (36 percent). Women also represented a much larger proportion of the part-time workforce (64 percent) than the full-time workforce (40 percent). Participation of females in part-time work was 19 percentage points higher than their participation in the entire workforce (Table 3.1). It is estimated that in 1992, close to 10 million women and 4 million men worked as part-timers voluntarily (Khane, 1994). Females make up a larger proportion of the part-time workforce among all age groups with the exception of those 65 years or older (Figure 3.3).

Age

Compared to the full-time workforce, significant age differences existed in the part-time group, where workers were concentrated primarily among the younger age groups. Forty-two percent of part-time workers fell between the ages of 16 and 29. Teenagers (16–19) were disproportionately represented in the part-time workforce at 17 percent, compared to their representation in the general (5 percent) or in the full-time (2 percent) workforce. Earlier studies

found that more than half of all employed teenagers, both male and female, were voluntary part-time workers (Deutermann and Brown, 1978). Young adults, ages 20 to 29, made up equal proportions of each workforce (25 percent).

While the proportion of seniors and the elderly (60+ years) in the part-time workforce was not as high as that of other age groups, it surpassed their participation in the general and the full-time workforce. Part-time work represented a very important source of work for those aged 65 or older. Workers in this age category represented four times the proportion of full-time workers in the same category.

Race

The racial composition of part-time workers was similar to that of the general working population. But the proportion of workers in each racial group that worked part-time in 1990 exhibited few differences: Asians—22 percent; whites—21 percent; blacks—20 percent; Native Americans—20 percent; and Hispanics—19 percent.

Marital Status

Half of all part-time workers were married—11.6 million in 1990. The proportion of married full-time workers was substantially higher than the part-time figure. Significant gender differences existed in marital status among part-time workers: 57 percent of females and 40 percent of males were married. In contrast, over half (51 percent) of male part-time workers had never married (Table 3.2a).

Part-time workers who had never married represented the second largest category of workers by marital status: 37 percent (8.4 million) in 1990. This proportion was almost twice as large as that of full-time workers (Table 3.1). Part-time workers who had never been married are

primarily teenagers and those between 20 and 29 years old. When teenagers between the age of 16 and 17 are excluded, the proportion of part-time workers who had never been married drop by about 5 percentage points to 32 percent (Table 3.2b),

Although widowed workers represented a smaller proportion of the part-time workforce, they numbered twice the proportion of full-time workers who were widowed. More than half of all widowed part-time workers were 65 years or older.

Education

In terms of education, the most significant difference between part-time workers and full-time workers was the proportion of those who had not completed high school. Twenty-five percent of all part-time workers fit this category. This figure compared to 14 percent of full-time workers without a high school degree. While teenagers have the largest proportion of part-time workers with less than a high school education between 12 and 31 percent of those in other age groups are without high school diplomas (Figure 3.4). Having less than a high school education has significant implications for both job type and job income and as such probably influences travel behavior and transportation mode.

Occupation

The proportion of part-time workers was higher than that of full-time workers in three occupational categories service, sales, and laborer. These three groups accounted for 44 percent of all part-time and 22 percent of all full-time workers. As compared to full-time workers, part-time workers were much more concentrated in sales and services than in managerial occupations. Four out of every 10 jobs in the service sector were part-time jobs (Figure 3.5). In 1990, 23 percent (4.4 million) of part-time workers were employed in service occupations, compared to 8

percent(5.7 million) of full-time workers.

Part-time workers were also more likely to be found in sales occupations, with 15 percent of them working in these areas as compared to 9 percent of full-time workers engaging in similar lines of work. Although not as high as their presence in sales or services, part-timers were also significantly represented as handlers, equipment cleaners, and laborers (5 percent). The proportion of administrative occupations among part-time and full-time workers was 18 percent and 16 percent respectively (Table 3.1).

WOMEN IN THE PART-TIME WORKFORCE

Between 1980 and 1990, the number of women working part time increased by 17 percent, from 12,420,870 workers to 14,580,000, and according to Khane (1994), they accounted for 70 percent of the voluntary part-time workforce. This increasing participation has been attributed to a variety of factors, the major one being the flexibility offered by part-time jobs. This flexibility allows women to combine work and family responsibilities and is often cited as a primary reason why women are found in greater proportion among voluntary part-time workers.

The proportion of females who work part time was considerably higher than the proportion of males. In 1990, 64 percent of all part-time workers were females, representing an increase of close to 2 percentage points over their proportion in 1980. Between 1970 and 1980, the supply of and demand for female workers increased. The supply was driven by the impact of economic restructuring, which increased the need for two wage earners in a household as real wages fell and unemployment increased (Kodras and Padavic, 1993). During that period economic expansion was high enough to accommodate this new supply, at least in part-time employment.

More than half (53 percent) of women working part time were between the ages of 30 and 59. This figure was much higher than the proportion of all part-time workers in this age category. Women were less likely than men to be part of the teenage, senior, and elderly part-time group.

Fifty-seven percent of all female part-time workers were married. While we cannot tell directly from our analysis, according to Khane (1994), one-fifth of all married working women were doing so on voluntary part-time working schedules. The proportion of married female part-time workers was slightly higher than that of married full-time workers.

While the rise in the proportion of married women in the workforce has been leveling off, participation by female heads of household is on the increase, a rise that has important implications for workforce participation. In 1990, the proportion of female part-time workers who were widowed (5 percent) or divorced (7 percent) was slightly higher than the general population.

According to the rate of occurrence, the second most common group of women who worked part time were those who had never been married (29 percent). However, the proportion of female part-timers who had never been married is much smaller than the proportion of men in that category.

Women who worked part time were found primarily in service (24 percent), administrative (23 percent), sales (18 percent), and professional (16 percent) occupations. (See Table 3.3.) The proportion of female part-time workers in all of these occupations was higher than the proportion of male part-timers. Female presence in these occupations explains the higher overall proportion of part-time workers in these jobs, especially in contrast to the full-time workforce.

TEENAGERS IN THE PART-TIME WORKFORCE

There were 3.9 million teenagers working part time in 1990. Unlike the general part-time workforce, almost an equal split existed between male and female teenagers in this category. As would be expected, close to two-thirds of all teens in this group had less than a high school education, since the majority (87 percent) of them were still enrolled in school.

Teenage part-time workers were concentrated in service and sales jobs, at higher proportions than that of other part-time workers (Table 3.4). Although close to 13 percent of all teenage part-time workers lived in households with annual incomes of less than \$10,000, teen part-timers were more likely to live in households with incomes of over \$40,000.

When compared to females and seniors, teenagers worked fewer hours. Only 11 percent of them worked between 30 and 34 hours a week, compared to 25 percent of female and 24 percent of senior part-time workers.

SENIORS AND THE ELDERLY IN THE PART-TIME WORKFORCE

In 1990, 1.1 million part-time workers between the ages of 60 and 64 were employed. Among this group, whites (88 percent) were slightly more represented than their proportion in the general part-time workforce, while blacks (7 percent) and other minority groups (4 percent) were slightly less represented. The overwhelming majority of senior part-time workers were married, and a larger proportion of these seniors than of full-time workers were likely to be widowed or divorced.

Senior part-time workers were concentrated in administrative, service, sales, and professional occupations, and they participated in management (8 percent), at twice the rate of the

general part-time workforce (4 percent).

In 1990, 3.3 million people aged 65 or older (the elderly) were employed. More than half of this group worked part time. Forty-five percent of these workers were between the ages of 65 and 74.

Slightly more than half (53 percent) of them were males, a figure 17 percentage points higher than the proportion of men in this age group in the general part-time workforce. The proportion of white (88 percent) workers was 7 points higher in this age group than in the general workforce. All minority groups were slightly under-represented as workers in this group. This is a very important age group in the context of part-time work, as it represents the immediate post-retirement years, when many workers are in transition from full-time to part-time work, or to full retirement, depending on a host of income and physical factors. Almost two-thirds of these elderly workers had a high school degree or less. This large proportion of less-educated elderly workers could mirror the need for part-time work as a supplement to retirement income.

Conversely, the proportion of elderly part-time workers who held a masters degree or higher was 3 percentage points higher than the rate of the similar group in the general workforce. These professionals maintain a link with the workforce through part-time employment. They may be highly compensated for their work or have a high retirement income, but continue to work part time.

Like the rest of the part-time workforce, the elderly were most likely to be employed in service, administrative, sales, and professional occupations but worked slightly fewer hours than workers the general part-time workforce. As with senior part-time workers, a slightly higher rate of elderly workers were found in managerial part-time positions.

INCOME OF PART-TIME WORKERS

Income affects the way people travel to work. Workers living in low income households generally have limited transportation choices and are more likely to commute to work by public transit than by automobile. Part-time workers earn less on average than full-time employees (Owen, 1978). In 1990, 9.4 million (42 percent) of all part-time workers lived in households with annual incomes of less than \$30,000. It is important to note that forty-four percent of these workers were females (Table 3.4). Studies have found that both youthful age and low schooling among part-time workers are also associated with relatively low wages (Kosters, 1995).

Part-time workers lived in households with an average income of \$42,911 (Table 3.5). Median household income was \$35,700 per year. Interesting disparities existed between personal and household incomes among the major groups of part-time workers. On average, (16–19) teenage part-time workers lived in households with the highest income—close to \$46,000 annually—and elderly (65–74) part-time workers live in households with the lowest average annual income—\$37,300. The story was quite different, however, with regard to personal income. Teenagers had the lowest personal income—on average close to \$3,000 while elderly part-time workers had the highest personal income—on average close to \$23,000.

Minority Income

Personal income was generally much lower among part-time workers than among full-time workers. Two-thirds of all part-time workers had a personal income of less than \$25,000 annually. The greatest discrepancies by race were in the lowest and highest income categories. White part-time workers exhibited a much higher personal income than the other racial groups.

Low personal income among part-time workers may have serious implications for their journey-to-work behavior. More than a third of all Hispanic and Asian part-time workers had less than \$10,000 in personal income. For both groups, the proportion of workers earning less than \$10,000 was 11 percentage points higher than white workers and 5 percentage points higher than black workers (Table 3.6).

Minority part-time workers were more likely than white part-time workers to live in households with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 (Table 3.7). Among minority groups, Hispanics were disproportionately more likely to live in households of less than \$10,000, with a rate that was two times higher than that of blacks and Asians and close to five times higher than that of whites and Native Americans. This Hispanic group may experience a more limited access to automobiles than the other comparative minority groups.

Women comprised the majority of low-income part-time workers. Two-thirds of women part-time workers earned less than \$10,000 annually in personal income. Female Hispanic and Asian part-time workers were the most likely to have had personal income of less than \$10,000 (Table 3.8).

WHY WORK PART-TIME?

Why did the four groups of workers—women, teenagers, and seniors and the elderly—work part time? Even though we cannot differentiate voluntary from involuntary part-time workers, the data suggest several reasons why workers may engage in part-time work. In most cases, household income is an explanatory variable, resulting in very interesting scenarios and differences across part-time worker groups.

Females who worked part time fell into three groups. The first group of women lived in high-income households. They may have worked part time voluntarily to make money for extras or items beyond basic family needs. These women were also likely to have been highly educated. A large proportion (26 percent) of married women with individual incomes of between \$10,000 and \$14,999 live in households with at least \$60,000 incomes, and more than half of those who earned \$15,000 or more individually lived in households with \$60,000 incomes (Table 3.9). Only 5 percent of those earning less than \$10,000 individually lived in households with less than \$10,000 in annual income.

The second group of women who worked part time did so to supplement family income and move the family beyond low and or moderate income. For these women who may have been in joint-income households, part-time work was an important source of funds to use in fulfilling household obligations such as paying basic bills. As noted in Table 3.9, more than half of all married women with individual incomes of between \$10,000 and \$14,999 lived in households with annual incomes of between \$20,000 and \$39,999, where they are contributing a significant proportion of the income.

The third group of women who worked part time were those who headed households. Income derived from part-time work was important for both individual and family support. For example, 43 percent of unmarried women with individual incomes of \$10,000 to \$14,999 were living in households with annual incomes of \$10,000 to \$14,999 (Table 3.9). This suggests that these women were the primary, if not the sole, source of support for the household.

Teenagers were likely to have worked part time for a variety of reasons. More than 80 percent of teen part-timers were enrolled in an educational institution. This group may have

worked to pay for some basics. Teenagers not enrolled in school may have worked part time as a transition to full-time work or, perhaps, because they could not find a full-time job and part-time work was the only employment available.

The story among older workers was different. Some workers may have worked part time because they wanted to remain in their profession even after retirement from full-time jobs. Some may have had sufficient income and part-time work provided extra money. Other workers may have worked part time because they had a limited retirement income and part-time work supplemented their retirement fund. The relationship between household income and personal income for these workers is reflected in Table 3.7.

PART-TIME WORK AND THE PRESENCE OF CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS OLD

The presence of children under 18 years old in a household is significant both for part-time work and for the work-travel pattern. Parent status is a significant determinant of female labor supply. However, the majority of females working part time do not have children in the household, the data reflect a decline in the propensity to work as the continuum moves from unmarried, childless women to married, childless women to married women with children. Other studies have also shown that among married women, work patterns differ by the needs of their children. For example, while 78 percent of mothers whose children ranged in age from 6 to 17 worked at some time in 1992, the proportion who worked was much lower (67 percent) among those whose youngest child was under 6 years old (Hayghe and Bianchi, 1994).

In 1990, 5.8 million women who had children under age 18, worked part time. Among the general female part-time population, 10 percent had pre-school children under 6 years old, 21

percent were living with children between the ages of 6 and 17 year old, and 8 percent had both preschool and school-age children (Table 3.10). Asian (44 percent) and Hispanic (41 percent) female part-time workers were the most likely to be living with children under age 18. Among white, black, and Native American female part-time workers, slightly more than a third of the females in each group lived with children under 18 years old.

There were significant marital status differences among part-time working women who had children under 18 years old in the household. For example, 66 percent of married females working part time, had children under 18 years old. Only 13 percent of unmarried females (i.e., divorced, widowed, separated, or never married) working part time had children in this age group. In 1990, 817, 212 females working part time, and not married, had children under age 18 present in the household. Most of these women were probably single females heading families. This is a significant and important group of women, with, quite often, limited transportation options.

The presence of children among unmarried female part-time workers was highest among black (27 percent) and Asian (26 percent) workers (Table 3.10). They were more than twice as likely to have children in the household as unmarried women in other categories. There are important implications for the journey to work among these groups. Studies have shown that differences in transportation mode exist among women by marital status and the presence of children (McLafferty and Preston, 1996). By most indications, single women with lower incomes who have children may be particularly challenged when combining household responsibilities with commuting. Low-income workers rely on public transit, particularly bus, for transportation to work. In addition, women are more likely to link trips on their way to a job. Children may make

the trip to work more difficult for mothers who work part-time hours, and use an automobile less often.

AUTOMOBILE AVAILABILITY AMONG PART-TIME WORKERS

While the majority of part-time workers have access to an automobile, significant differences in automobile availability existed between groups (Table 3.11). Teenage part-time workers, for example, were the most likely to live in households with an automobile. In fact, they were likely to live in households with three or more automobiles. This statistic does not necessarily mean that they had access to these autos for their work journey. It is unclear what proportion of the group had direct access to an automobile for this purpose. Among both women and senior and elderly part-time workers, 5 percent lived in households with no automobile. In the next chapter we will examine the association between the lack of a car in the household and the income of these workers, and the impact of these factors on the journey to work.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has emphasized the great diversity among part-time workers, as well as the significant differences found between the part-time and full-time workforce. Based on gender and age, four groups of workers dominated the part-time workforce: women, primarily between ages 30 and 59; teenagers 16 to 19 years old (more than half of whom were male); and seniors and the elderly, between ages 60 and 74 (the majority of whom were also male workers). The analysis has revealed several differences in marital status, education, income, occupation, and the presence of children between these groups of workers in the part-time workforce.

Women part-time workers were more likely to be married, whereas men were more likely to have remained single. Marital status was an important variable among part-time workers, especially in explaining the choice of voluntary part-time over full-time work, and the choices of transportation.

In general, workers with less than a high school education were disproportionately represented in the part-time workforce. They included teenagers, many of whom were still enrolled in school, and senior and elderly part-time workers who had never graduated from high school.

People work part time to earn an income for a variety of reasons. While not a clear measure of the part-time work choice, the relationship between personal income and household income allows us to begin to understand the possible motives for choosing a given path. For example, teenagers still enrolled in school and living in households with medium to high incomes are likely to work part time to earn spending money and to gain work experience.

The evidence suggests that married women who work part time and live in households with medium to high incomes, either work to supplement household income or to earn extra spending money. Single women with personal incomes of between \$10,000 and \$14,999 work part time to survive. More than 40 percent of these women live in homes with household incomes in the same category. This suggests that the personal income of these workers is almost synonymous with the household income.

Service, administrative, sales, and professional occupations form the bulk of part-time jobs, and female part-time workers are disproportionately represented in these occupations. Three times more females work part time in service jobs than do full-time workers.

Significant differences were found among women part-time workers with children under age 18. These differences, especially between married and single women, are likely to affect their transportation to work. Answers to these and other transportation-to-work issues will be analyzed in the next chapter.